

Los Hermanos Mayo: Photographing Exile

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The Hermanos Mayo know what it means to have to emigrate. Since 1939, this collective of photojournalists has played a pivotal role in redefining Mexico's graphic reportage, but their story began in a Spain about to explode into one of the modern world's great conflagrations: the Spanish Civil War. There, on the eve of so many hopes and such disappointment, the Mayo Brothers established their link with the «underdogs» which has lasted to the present day. The pseudonym «Mayo,» which the five «brothers»-Francisco (Paco), Faustino, Julio, Cándido, and Pablo--have used is a *nombre de guerra* which reflects their commitment to the working class; it was also a result of the difficulties which can accompany such an allegiance (1).

It appears that the sobriquet was first acquired as a result of some photographs that Paco and Faustino took during the repression of a Madrid May Day march in the beginning of the 1930s. As Faustino tells it:

"Paco, Manolo (a deaf comrade), and I went out. There were going to be elections and everybody was talking about creating a republic: the crowd was openly hostile to the *Guardia Civil*, who were hated because of their oppression. During the parade, workers' contingents began protesting vociferously against the economic crisis and demanding their rights. The *Guardia Civil* attacked them and many marchers were wounded or killed. We shot photos of the battle and they were published the next day in newspapers. Everybody was commenting on the «May Day photos» (*las fotos de mayo*): they began saying, «Mayo, Mayo,» and so we became the Hermanos Mayo".

This gesture of allowing the public to christen them with the name of labour's foremost celebration later became a necessity. The energies liberated by the declaration of the Second Spanish Republic in April of 1931 led to continual political ferment and insistent worker protests. The conflicts were increasingly pronounced during the *Bienio negro*, when a reactionary government blocked those energies from the end of 1933 to February of 1936.

Paco had acquired a reputation as a photojournalist who was too interested in politics, particularly labour struggles, and his sympathies had led him to take controversial photographs such as that of a saber-wielding mounted policeman attacking a worker on foot. In 1934, Paco left Madrid to cover the story of Asturian miners who were occupying their work places in a sit-down strike. He joined in their cause, entering the mines together with Dolores Ibarruri («*La Pasionaria*»): they refused to leave until the strike had been settled. The miners' struggle was much commented on in the press, and Paco's participation in it led to a series of police raids on his family's house. Seeing the necessity of protecting his mother and younger siblings, who had been left vulnerable by the early death of their father, Paco changed the name of his agency from Foto Souza to Foto Mayo (2).

Between the creation of the Second Republic and the outbreak of the Civil War-which began with an uprising of fascist army troops on 18 July, 1936-the Hermanos Mayo worked for various moderately progressive newspapers such as *El heraldo de Madrid* and *El liberal*. They also participated in publications more committed to the left: *Mundo obrero*, *Renovación*, *Juventud roja*, *El socialista* and *Claridades*.

When the war began, they joined different units. Julio was the only Mayo to fight with arms as well as with a camera; he manned a mortar and also served as a photographer for his brigade's newspaper, *Superación*. Faustino was working for the well-known Spanish photojournalist, Díaz Casariego. He covered the defense of Madrid from the muddy trenches of the University, and came away with some images which greatly impressed Enrique Lister, Commander of the Eleventh Division. Lister saw the photographs and called the newspaper: «I want that young reporter.» Faustino joined Lister's forces and was sent to work in the First Brigade's newsletter, *Pasaremos*, which was directed by Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez, later to become an important Marxist philosopher in Mexico. Faustino served on various fronts of the war-Madrid, the Sierra de Guadarrama, Jarama, the Ebro, Belchite, Barcelona-but always as a photographer; the only time he thought of using the small pistol Lister had given him was to shoot himself when it appeared that he was going to be captured by Italians. Paco also limited his participation to press photography, working for the newspapers, *El frente de Teruel* and *El paso del Ebro*. He sent his rolls of film to Cándido, who developed, printed, and delivered the photos to publications in the Republican zone.

With the Republican defeat in February of 1939, Paco, Faustino, and Cándido crossed over into France with their respective units and in the company of a half million Spaniards: men, women, and children (3). The French-«our beloved neighbors,» Julio ironically observes-were ill -prepared to receive an immigration of such magnitude. Moreover, the government in power was right-wing and composed of groups who had opposed aid to the Republicans during the war.

The infamous treatment that the Spaniards suffered in the French concentration camps has been amply documented in words and drawings (4). Beatings, rapes, and robberies were only the most obvious examples of the abuse they

received at the hands of the French guards; the lack of potable water, food and medical attention also added to the numerous dead and sick in the improvised camps along the coast, where the freezing winds and rains of February made life «inhuman» for the defenseless refugees.

For some of the Hermanos Mayo, life in the concentration camps was worse than for others. Faustino began his «odyssey» in the camp at Saint Cyprien, but his rebelliousness quickly earned him a transfer. Furious that the French treated them like criminals, and tired of the constant diet of lentil soup-which became completely inedible as the plates filled with rain during the hundred-yard walk from the kitchen to the eating area-he threw his plate on the ground. For this infraction, he was assigned to forced labour at Colliure Castle, where the French had incarcerated members of the International Brigade. Together with Cándido, they worked «like slaves» with picks and shovels from six in the morning to six at night, a travail to which the diminutive photographer and the boy of seventeen were little accustomed.

One day a letter from Paco arrived, saying «the hour has come!» He had made contact with Enrique Lister and Fernando Gamboa, the Mexican diplomat in charge of selecting Spanish refugees for immigration to that country; every effort was being expended to get Faustino and Cándido onto the immigration list and out of the camps. The French guards read all the mail, and they couldn't resist the temptation to write in Spanish on the envelope, «That's what you think, you son-of-a-bitch!». Nonetheless, the hour finally did come, and the two prisoners were released from Colliure Castle, leaving behind the little money they had and the watch Lister had given Faustino.

One of the few countries to befriend the Republican cause was the Mexico of Lázaro Cárdenas, the most far-sighted of its presidents. Rejecting the ignominious «Pact of Non-Intervention» which England, France, and the United States signed, Mexico and the Soviet Union were the only nations to send arms and food supplies to the loyalist side. Very much aware of how the tide was turning against the Republic, Mexico began to accept refugees as early as 1937, when the «Children of Morelia» arrived.

On June 13, 1939, three of the Hermanos Mayo-Paco, Faustino, and Cándido-landed in Veracruz aboard the ship «Sinaia.» They came in a group of some 1,600 refugees,«The First Expedition of Spanish Republicans to Mexico,» according to the name the emigrants had given themselves in the shipboard newspaper they created en route. In the port, they were welcomed by prominent Mexican figures--among them, Ignacio García Tellez, the Secretary of Government (Gobernación), and Vicente Lombardo Toledano, the important labour leader-as well as the band of the famous Fifth Regiment, which played the «International» while the refugees held their closed fists high in the Republican salute.

Establishing themselves in the New World, they quickly re-constituted their collective, Foto Hermanos Mayo. Since then they have worked for more than forty magazines and newspapers, including *El popular*, *La prensa*, *Hoy*, *Mañana*, *Siempre!*, *Tiempo*, *Sucesos*, *Time* and *Life*. More important, they have participated in the founding of magazines and newspapers that reflect their commitment to democratic forces in Mexico, from the short-lived *Tricolor* and *Más* to the still-active and well-respected *El día*.

Perhaps they can be considered as the first «democratizing» photojournalists in Mexico, a country where mass publications have generally been dominated by government control (5).

Clearly, their experience of the history they lived in Europe was instrumental in providing them with a different perspective from that of their Mexican colleagues. The Soviet revolution had an evident and overwhelming impact on Paco, the ideologue of the Mayo Brothers, and one imagines that the beginnings of critical photojournalism in Weimar Germany must have had their effect as well (6). Although there is no evidence of a movement in Spain equivalent to the proliferation of Film and Photo Leagues in other countries- and both Julio and Faustino deny that it existed-the creation of these leftist cultural collectives did have some consequences, for Cristina Zelich has written of Spanish photography that,

"During this period more than any other, photographs appeared ...with a clear and obvious ideological basis (such as those produced by the Arbeiter Fotografie in Germany or later by the Film and Photo League in the United States) Following this general spirit, Spanish documentary photography in the era between the World Wars centered on popular themes " (7).

Nonetheless, whatever the effects of other influences, the pivotal factor in the Mayo Brothers' development was without question their participation in the Spanish Civil War. It has been said that this war constituted the genesis of modern photojournalism-at least in Spain-in the sense of requiring graphic reporters to become participants, take sides, and enter into the very midst of the action. This idea was perhaps best condensed in the phrase of Robert Capa, the most famous of the Civil War photographers: «If your photos aren't good enough, you aren't close enough.» (8).

The insistence on «getting close enough» must be understood in terms of both political commitment and technological developments. The Mayo Brothers' decision to fight on the side of the forces defending democracy in Spain placed them in a very different camp than the supposed objectivity which had characterized prior Mexican photojournalism. For example, their political stance was far from the Positivist eulogies for Porfirian progress which were typical of Agustín Víctor Casasola or the unconditional acceptance of the post-revolutionary rulers that can be seen in the photos of Enrique Díaz (9). The Hermanos Mayos' experiences in Spain had given them a different way of

seeing and focusing on reality; they had something new to offer Mexican photojournalism. For Faustino, close-ups expressed best the active commitment required of graphic reporters. He felt that, although Mexican photographers were good, they limited themselves generally to panoramic shots, while members of the Mayo collective took «close-ups of faces and details-boots, hands, eyes, smiles-things that had never really been seen before in Mexican periodicals.» (10).

Another contribution of the Mayo collective was perhaps more concrete: they introduced Mexican photojournalists to the Leica cameras which they had bought in Spain and carried throughout the Civil War (11). Invented in Germany in 1924, the Leica was small and light, compared to the bulky box cameras with bellows and glass plates; it radically increased reporters' mobility, allowing them to move about freely and get into the center of events without being too conspicuous. This was quite a different situation than that of having to stand in one spot, either weighed down by a heavy camera or even more inconvenienced by a tripod, and being immediately identifiable to the forces of repression. The technological innovation of the 35mm camera resulted in a new esthetic of photojournalism, something apparent in images taken from within the very vortexes of struggles, for example, battles between striking teachers and policemen during 1958. The Mayo collective played essentially the same innovators' role in Mexico that other European emigrants such as Erich Salomon, Alfred Eisenstaedt and Capa did in U.S. publications (12).

«The arrival of Paco, Cándido, and Faustino with three Leicas was like bringing three Volkswagens into the country fifty years ago,» Julio reflected. However, their road was not quite that smooth: the photo editors in Mexican publications did not believe that publishable images could be made from the Leicas' tiny 35mm negatives, and they preferred the larger 3 1/4 by 4 1/4 negative plates that the bigger cameras held. Despite this, the Mayo Brothers had an enormous advantage even in the area of film: the Leicas carried rolls with 30-40 exposures, while the older cameras had plates that accommodated only 12 exposures. Once it became clear that the 35mm negatives were perfectly acceptable for newspaper and magazine work, the greater number of photographs the Hermanos Mayo could take gave them more possibilities of covering events thoroughly. The fact that the Leicas could be adapted with different lenses was also important. The telephoto lenses which the Mayo Brothers employed to get nearer to events had not been used previously in Mexico; further, the capacity, above all of Paco, to utilize amber and yellow-green filters added yet another distinctive quality to their work.

Their technical capacities, combined with their ability to work collectively, allowed for both the opportunity to shoot many more negatives as well as to catalogue them, a great problem for photojournalists. The coupling of technological advantage and collective labour accounts for their enormous archive of some five million negatives and explains their «gift of ubiquity,» which Carlos Monsiváis has so appropriately recognized (13). However, perhaps even more important than their ubiquitousness and the extraordinary quantity of photographs they have made is the fact that they have taken them while working. As Julio explained, «Ninety-nine percent of our photos are the result of work orders we've received to cover stories.» That the Mayo Brothers have earned their living as photojournalists has been definitive: they have been tied to the quotidian necessity of providing images to the various periodicals with which they have commitments; their work must be judged in terms of the way this fact has mediated it.

Photojournalists are a particular combination of artist, artisan, and worker. While self-expression is an important element in their work, they are almost always limited to photographing that to which they are assigned, and they usually have little or no say about the ways in which their work is employed which images are chosen from among those they have taken, how they are cropped, where they are placed, the relationship of captions to the photos, and the subsequent uses to which they are put. Thus, we might argue that the better photojournalists combine the creativity and technical skills of the artist and artisan, all the while working within an alienated situation similar to that of the industrial worker. As David Levi Strauss wrote about the work of Richard Cross and John Hoagland, distinguished U.S. photojournalists killed in El Salvador, «They did not own the pictures they made any more than a worker in a munitions factory owns the weapons he makes while employed.» (14).

The Hermanos Mayo have attempted to overcome their vulnerability as photojournalists through various tactics: working in a collective, possessing their own archive, and participating actively in founding and contributing to publications such as *Tricolor*, *Más*, and *El día* (15). Nevertheless, when we compare their work to that of artists or documentary photographers, certain qualifications are necessary. They can be distinguished from artists such as Manuel Álvarez Bravo through the lack of control over what they photograph and the uses to which it is put. In addition, they differ from documentary photographers such as Graciela Iturbide or Pedro Meyer-or even Nacho López, a photojournalist who enjoyed great autonomy within the popular illustrated magazines-because they have to operate within a structure of established journalistic rules which require them to «cover» events in particular ways. Further, rather than being able to dedicate themselves to a particular theme for long periods, they must cover different stories, sometimes in the same day (16). We can analyze the photos of Álvarez Bravo or Iturbide in terms of intentionality; that is, we conceive of such artists as individuals who work in contexts that permit them a great deal of freedom, and we consequently judge their art in terms of the degree to which they were able to realize their intentions.

This is not the case with the Hermanos Mayo, whose intentions have always been mediated by the incessant obligation to meet their daily consignments.

However, this constraint may be precisely what permits us to consider the Mayo collective's photography an example of «workers' art.» They took their photos from the particular optic of leftist political refugees, but they also took them as their daily labour. To a certain extent, this analysis is guided by what Jean-Paul Sartre described as the limit of freedom in the contemporary world: that which a person can make out of what is made of him or her (17). For, in examining the ways in which the Mayo images reflect their situation as workers or artisans, I do not intend to limit myself to describing the negative aspects. Rather, I believe that their work ought to be understood as the product of a mediating or shaping process: the photographs are a result of the confrontation between the intentions of the Hermanos Mayo and their material restraints.

It is important to consider the different ways in which the Mayo Brothers consciously assumed a working-class perspective. Perhaps the classic worker's image by the Hermanos Mayo is a low-angle photograph of a labourer shouldering a sledge-hammer (18). Heroically framed against the sky, the worker hoists a hammer-the sickles will be raised by *campesinos* in other Mayo images-whose steel is a metaphor for his iron will. Julio has stated that this is a deliberate reference by Paco to Stakhanovism, the glorification of workers in the Soviet Union during the 1930s. The image is clearly extremely stylized, but the essential problem is the framing. The low angle empowers the labourer, but it is a power without a context. Framed against the heavens in a visual structure that may represent the paradisaical future of the proletariat, the worker is removed from history and presented to us as a myth outside of time. He embodies a dignity, but it is a mythical dignity. Finally, the abstraction of the worker from a context shifts the balance in the image from information to the creative eye of the photographer: the reality of labour is secondary to the glorification of myth and aesthetic expression.

Perhaps what saved the Mayo Brothers from continuing in the vein of such expressive «*obrerismo*» was the fact that they were workers. Thus, they developed a style of photographing with an eye to uncovering the relations within a frame- something of great importance in modern Mexican photojournalism. For instance, in the photo of the worker in the boiler room of the textile factory, the composition emphasizes how technology and labour are mutually defined by formally juxtaposing wheels and the worker's body. Here, we are not seeing the sort of unconditional adulation present in the low-angle image; rather, the relationship between the worker and the wheels is a graphic depiction of the form in which a labourer and his or her context mutually define each other.

The relational structure in the Mayo images is a crucial element in avoiding another innate danger to the photographing of work: «industrialism.» During the 1930s, Mexican illustrated magazines such as *Hoy* and *Rotofoto* had almost entirely ignored the working class, except for engaging in vicious attacks on its leaders. In their images of factories, workers were generally absent, while machines and bosses were most present. Caught up in industrialist euphoria, Mexican photojournalists followed the models offered by *Life*, *Look*, and *Fortune*, where photographers such as Andreas Feininger «produced images of mining, hydroelectric operations, oil, steel and coal production in which the inanimate machines and their products often seem more alive than the expressionless workers.» (19).

The vision of the Hermanos Mayo, though, is closer to that of the great U.S. «social photographer,» Lewis Hine, than to the illustrated magazines. Like the photos of Hine, those of the Mayo never forget that wealth and development can never be the sole product of machines. On the contrary, their images focus on the relationship of the worker to his or her context. This capacity to articulate the dialectic between the machine and the human spirit within the images is a constant in their more eloquent photos. For example, we see a textile worker at his loom in Puebla in 1947. We might be tempted to perceive him as a puppet dangling from strings, but the active attitude of the labourer demonstrates his creativity and power.

In observing the assembly line of the Ford factory in Hermosillo during 1952, we view the workers as trapped in a situation which reduces them to the level of the machines they make and with which they work. Converted into simply another inanimate element of the line, they can be a faithful reflection of the reality of labour in modern factories. Everything that surrounds the worker functions to reduce him to the level of a machine part, to submerge him in the «inevitable laws» of industrialism. But, if the Mayo Brothers have given us a powerful image of the «force of circumstances,» they have also registered the labourer's face that appears from among the machines and looks into the camera, recognizing and honoring the human spirit that confronts and struggles against such a reductive process.

If the «Stakhanovist» image of the labourer and sledge-hammer fails to render an appropriate visualization of the worker-context relation-and it appears a bit dated today-the extremely low-angle utilized signaled one of the expressive techniques that the Hermanos Mayo would employ in representing the Mexican working class. For example, the slightly low-angle gives power to the miners in Pachuca, it also adds to the dynamism present in the photographic structure of the railroad workers in Nonoalco and the women reconstructing airplanes in Torreón. Of course, the obverse is also true: by shooting down on bureaucrats and using a lense with a wide enough angle to capture the crowded work context, the Mayo collective was able to present them as confined in a suffocating situation.

The documentation of social struggles in Mexico is an important part of the Mayo archive. As Faustino explained, «I've fought from the beginning on the workers' side, and people on the left come looking for me to document their struggles.» However, fully aware of the problems which this can lead to in Mexico, he adds, «But, if I always look for the political in the graphic, I don't get into politics because I'm Spanish and I ought not to.» However, they have been present in every major and many minor *zafarranchos*, street battles that result from police and army repression.

For example, their images may be the best taken of the crucial 1958-59 strikes, where teachers, telegraphers, and railroad and oil workers clashed with government forces during the most important social movements in Mexico since the revolution of 1910-1917 (20). There, they portrayed the dramatic moment when telegraph workers emphatically demanded the resignation of the Director of Communications. They also captured the strikers' energy- and solidarity-in the magnificently dynamic photo of a Red Cross team carrying a wounded oil worker. They registered the outrage evident on a telegrapher's face as he glared at a bayonet-bearing representative of the invading forces, as well as the joy of jailed railroad workers on their release from prison. They recorded the disgust of an engineer looking down on one of the soldiers occupying the train stations, and the exuberance of the railroad workers later that same night, when their candidate won by a margin of 59,000 to nine and put a short-lived end to the army's presence and government control of the union.

The Hermanos Mayo also covered the student movement of 1968. There, they preserved for perpetuity the blows suffered by the students, in the image of a beating during a protest against police violence! They captured the dissent against this brutality, presenting the women who marched in an attempt to save their children from the consequences of questioning authority in Mexico. This dialectic of oppression and resistance is portrayed in images of students forced to lie on the ground; there, even under the threat of the bayonets' glare, they persist in their struggle for free expression.

Perhaps the most intriguing Mayo image of the 1968 student movement is one in which no people appear. In a photo taken on October 3, we look down from high above Tlatelolco Plaza where the night before the greatest massacre in modern Mexican history had taken place. However, rather than blood and bodies, we are given a metaphor for and a reflection on the history of violence in Mexico. In Tlatelolco, also known as the «Plaza of Three Cultures,» we see the pyramids where the Aztecs made their last stand against the Spanish conquest; we see the colonial church, arm of the colonizing process; we see the modern apartment buildings-constructed for the working class-which surround the plaza. Framing the scene in the foreground, we are confronted with the holes made by the soldiers' bullets, graphic evidence of the brutality unchained by a state which refuses to share power with the people.



1. Faustino Mayo covering the Madrid front from the trenches in University City, Madrid, November 7-9, 1936.
2. Faustino Mayo with his *compadre* Cantinflas, at breakfast in the Churubusco Studios, c. 1945.

How many of these photos of struggle and repression the Hermanos Mayo have been able to publish is yet to be known; given the number of newspapers and magazines in which they have worked, such research will be long and difficult. But, their impact is undeniable, as can be seen in what is arguably their most powerful photo. The image of a mother crying over the body of her dead son—a young Communist killed by goons from the official unions when he attempted to join the 1952 May Day march—so caught the attention of the great muralist, David Alfaro Siqueiros, that he reproduced it in a mural (21). However, it is important to point out that this photo never appeared in *Mañana's* coverage of the event. More ambiguous photos taken by the Mayo Brothers were published, such as the image of

fighting between the independent syndicalists and union thugs, through which the magazine was able to assure a reactionary reading by referring to the «innocent victims» of «red provocation,» while characterizing the protestors as «Communist gunfighters» and «crazy anti-patriotic agitators.» (22). But the photo of the grieving mother would not allow for the transformation of this image's significance through the utilization of an «extraneous conceptual framework.» (23). It is too powerful and speaks too much for itself; for that reason, it could not be published.

At any rate, it could not be included in the reportage on May Day. However, with the passage of time, this photo was recontextualized; thus tamed, it appeared in a 1955 photo essay on the «Most Journalistic Mayo Photos.» (24). There, the image was ripped out of its real matrix and, with a cynicism which relied on the ambiguity of even the most powerful photos, was assigned a fabricated significance, transforming an historical instance of the struggle against *charrismo* into a timeless and recurrent phenomenon of daily life: «Who is she? Who is he? Their simple names, from the pueblos, are condensed in this brief eloquence: mother and son. The mother destroyed by pain, the son knocked down by death. The scene: the *Cruz Verde* some day in 1950. Any day in which drama can occur. The moment which Julio Mayo etched cannot be more moving.» (25).

Like the anonymous carvers of the pyramids, the unknown painters of the colonial churches, and popular lithographers such as Jose Guadalupe Posada, the Hermanos Mayo are but one of the more recent expressions of that ancient Mexican tradition in which art is a product of the struggle for daily bread. And the Mayo Brothers had to suffer prejudice and discrimination, as well as adjust themselves to their new country. Faustino recounts that he was offered a position in the newspaper, *La prensa*, but encountered hostility on the part of the Director of Photography, Miguel Casasola, and the other graphic reporters: «What! A refugee here!» He was given the more repugnant assignments, such as the police beat. There, however, his experience and his amiability served him well, for the police allowed him to go back among the prisoners, something they wouldn't permit anyone else. When he returned to the office, Casasola was astonished: «How did you get these?» «Well,» replied Faustino, «you sent me there to screw me, but I screwed you.»

The anti-Spanish attitude in Mexico is largely a reaction to what are called «Gachupines,» Spaniards who have dedicated themselves to commerce and business in the New World. Like the other Republican refugees, the Hermanos Mayo fiercely rejected being confused with these other Spanish immigrants.

"As Julio stated, We weren't the typical «bread and onion» immigrants who had come here to plant fields or put up a whore house or see who we could exploit. Our circumstances were very different from those Spaniards with whom Mexicans were familiar before the Republicans arrived. So, there was a great distance between the two Spanish societies. For us, it was an honor to say: «I am a refugee.» We were proud of that, and we objected if they called us *Gachupines*; that was an insult, given the fact that *Gachupines* came to exploit people and make money."

Faustino also expressed these sentiments when, on giving his book, *Testimonios sobre México*, to President Miguel de la Madrid, he inscribed, «From a *refugee*.» De la Madrid asked Faustino why he had written that, and Faustino explained that it was a great honor for him to be a political refugee. More than forty years after arriving in Mexico, he still wanted to clearly differentiate himself from the *Gachupines*.

Among the myriad subjects the Mayo have photographed are the braceros, Mexican workers who were legally contacted to labour in the United States during and after World War II. Although the braceros and the Mayo Brothers both belong to the «uprooted» of the world's peoples, there are obvious dissimilarities between the circumstances behind their emigration. For Faustino, they are,

"Exactly the opposite. We arrived with the doors open, thanks to Lazaro Cárdenas; they were hassled and had to overcome obstacles in order to work. They were very badly treated in the U.S. People who want to work ought to have the right to, both there and here; anybody in the world who wants to work ought to have that right."

Julio also distinguishes sharply between the two cases:

"We were emigrants for political reasons, and they were emigrants because of hunger. We had no problem earning our living in Spain; the problem was that we would have been killed if we stayed. But, we did feel badly for those poor devils who had to leave their families and homes just to be able to earn a living. They should have been able to do that in Mexico." (26).

Whatever the differences between the emigration of the Mayo Brothers and that of the braceros, the sensitivity of these photographers to portray the various facets of the *emigre's* situation is evident. Although the number of images taken of braceros would not seem to demonstrate any particular concern on the part of the Hermanos Mayo, the fact that they reproduced the collective's «classic» photo of the worker with the hammer may indicate that there was more interest than there appears to have been. A «bracero» shoulders a pick, while the Mayo's low angle silhouettes him against the sky. Obviously posed, the fact that twenty negatives exist of this man in various poses suggests that Mayo had some very specific motive for making this image, in addition to the reference to the worker photo. However, it is difficult to know what the motive was, as I have never found the photo published.

The image of the «bracero» with the pick was probably taken near Mexico City, for the Mayo negatives on braceros generally deal with their experiences there. One of the aspects of the which the Mayo Brothers photographed most was the process at the «Contracting Centers» (*Centros de contratación*), the places where the aspirantes

(candidates) went to be recruited or «hooked» (*enganchados*). There, formed in interminable and exhausting lines, the tenacious aspirantes provided their personal data in response to a questionnaire designed by the contracting agencies and the Mexican government. They were submitted to medical examinations and provided orientation as to the contract mechanisms; those who were accepted, signed contracts for a minimum of six months.

It was to be expected that the Mayo Brothers would portray with empathy the endless lines of men waiting with papers in hand. The French helmets worn by the police must have been an ironic touch, bringing even closer to home for the Hermanos Mayo the resemblance to the French camps, with their lines, the forms to be filled out, and the signatures necessary in order to leave. Having suffered a similar experience, the Mayo Brothers have a sharp eye for the inhumanity of the bureaucratic red tape through which the braceros had to pass in Mexico City in order to be able to go to the U.S. legally. But, not content with a simple description of oppression, they also portray the dialectical response: people making something out of what is being made of them. Here, one of the more important issues surrounding the bracero images of the Mayo collective is the question of to what degree they could be said to belong to the category of «victim photography»; that is, to what extent their photos might involve «a double act of subjugation: first, in the social world that has produced its victims; second, in the regime of the image, produced within and for the system that engenders the conditions it then represents.» (27).

Certainly, their photos were intended to be consumed by a very different world than those from which they came. The middle-class readers of the newspapers and illustrated magazines in which the images appeared were worlds apart from the braceros. Within that context, the issue of «victim photography» revolves essentially around the question: To what degree do their images attempt to disrupt the systems in which they are inscribed? One aesthetic strategy for avoiding the victimization of the photographed is to display their interaction with the camera and, through this, to create an interplay of the photographic subjects with the audience. To cite two classical examples of this tactic, one need think only of the images of Walker Evans' tenant farmers and Josef Koudelka's gypsies, who pose themselves and return the camera's stare. (28).

The braceros' interactivity with the cameras of the Hermanos Mayo is exceptional even among the images of a collective noted for their sympathetic portrayal of the «underdogs.» For example, we see the *aspirantes* actively corresponding with the camera, laughing and looking directly at the photographer while the police threaten with their clubs. Note the dynamic attitude of the man at the right with his hands in his pockets, conscious of his posture. Knowing that he will be photographed, whatever his desires to the contrary, he expresses his being by striking a pose that depicts *his* reality and *his* way of occupying space, perhaps reminding the Mayos of how they may have postured before news reporters while guarded by French troops. Other images from the Contracting Centers which confirm the intention of the Mayos to capture the subjectivity of the *aspirantes* are those of *campesinos* from rural settings who stare into the lens.



3. Faustino Mayo with Enrique Lister, his former commander during the Spanish Civil War. Here, in Gran Vía, Madrid, 1976.

4. María Félix and Diego Rivera, with the recently-finished portrait he painted of her, Mexico City, c. 1950.

The skill of the Mayo Brothers at capturing the relation between the end of one thing and the beginning of something else -the leaving behind of familiar ways and family ties, the birth of possibilities- can be seen in the photos taken at Buenavista, the train station from which the braceros parted on their way to the border. Obviously, there is no shortage of images that reflect the sharp pain of separation: women crying as they bid farewell to a loved one on his way to seek his «fortune» in a strange world, fathers lifting their children for a last hug, clasped hands and interlocked eyes of couples as the train pulls out. How could it have been otherwise? The Hermanos Mayo knew only

too well the tearful partings of the Civil War, the families who separated to never again be reunited. But the grace and power of the Mayo Brothers lies in their refusal to succumb to such bitter nostalgia; they see and show in the «V» formed by the braceros' fingers the energies and emotions liberated by the apparently infinite possibilities that the new land will offer. It is a «V» that signifies the victory of those who do not cease to struggle, or at least of those who have cleared the first bureaucratic hurdles and know that *something* better must await them.

The Hermanos Mayo's photographs of the braceros are important for what they show us about those migratory workers and for what they tell us about the vision of these graphic reporters. In an effort to give still images an analytic mobility, the Mayo Brothers have developed the relationships they encounter in the opposite poles they perceive and portray: humiliation/ dignity, pain/ enthusiasm, state / campesino, repression/ struggle...the inhuman and the human. Through the collision of these realities, they produce a dialectic within and between the photos. Further, the «interactive» images of the Hermanos Mayo allow the photographed subjects to return the camera's gaze and insist on their own being. The human spirit's tenacity stands out as a value we see incarnated in the braceros who have been photographed.

Given their past as refugees and their situation as workers-and their consciousness of this fact-the Mayo Brothers have been able to produce these images where they shape a powerful and penetrating vision of the braceros. They portray not only their oppression-their condition as «poor devils»-but express as well their capacity to make decisions and to act in the most difficult of circumstances. Like the braceros, the Hermanos Mayo chose to move, to change their lives instead of dying-whether physically or as creative artists, as happened to Alfonso, perhaps the leading Spanish photojournalist of the 1930s, who was prohibited during Franco's regime from continuing to work in his field and was reduced to taking pictures of fascist generals posing amidst the destruction they had wrought (29). But, if it is important to applaud the artfulness of the Mayo collective, it is also necessary to recognize that those social realities had to exist before they could be reproduced in photographs. As Julio said, «Photography has its creative part, but within reality.»

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

Earlier versions of this essay have been published in MRAZ, J. "Foto Hermanos Mayo: A Mexican Collective," *History of Photography*, 17:1 (1993), MRAZ, J. "Los Hermanos Mayo: Trabajando una mirada/ Els Hermanos Mayo: Treballant una mirada/The Hermanos Mayo: Forging a Vision," *Foto Hermanos Mayo*. Valencia: Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, 1992; and MRAZ, J. And VELEZ STOREY, J. *Uprooted: Braceros in the Hermanos Mayo Lens*. Houston: Arte Público Press, 1996.

(1) In the course of its history, the collective has been made up of five men from two different families: Francisco (Paco) Souza Fernández (12 August 1912-26 September 1949), Cándido Souza Fernández (23 April 1922-11 November 1985), Julio Souza Fernández (18 October 1917), Faustino del Castillo Cubillo (8 October 1913), and Pablo del Castillo Cubillo (6 June 1922). Unless otherwise noted, the information in this essay is based on interviews conducted with Julio in February of 1986 and with Faustino during July of 1986, as well as on several later discussions with them. These interviews have been published in English and Spanish; the former is an expanded version and contains a description of the Mayo archive. See, MRAZ, J., «Close-up: an interview with the Hermanos Mayo, Spanish-Mexican photojournalists (1930s-present),» *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* 11 (1992).

(2) There are basically two versions of the origin of the pseudonym «Mayo.» There is what might be called Faustino's rendition, who states that the name was born in the aftermath of a May Day march in the early 1930s. See my interview with him in *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*; see also the history of the collective which appears in the «Presentación» of the book, *Testimonio sobre México* (Mexico?: n. p., n.d.): 127-129, presumably written by the book's author, TERCERO GALLARRO, L.. MONSIVÁIS, C. follows this version in his article, «Los fotógrafos Mayo: invención y rescate del pasado,» *Siempre!* 1652 (20 February, 1985): 8-9, as does PACHECO, C. «Medio siglo captó la vida en México,» *Siempre!* 1806 (3 February, 1988): 32-33, 86. MUSACCHIO, H. has also published an article which takes Faustino's version as the truth; see «La fotografía de prensa: Apuntes para un árbol genealógico,» in *Kiosco* III:3 (1992): 46 and *Fotografía de prensa en México: 40 reporteros gráficos*, México: Procuraduría General de la República, 1992: 93.

The other rendering is that of Julio, who affirmed in my interview with him that the name was adopted by Paco after the events of 1934 in Asturias and was first used on May Day of 1935. This version has been published in SOUTO ALABARCE, A., «Fotografía,» *El exilio español en México, 1939-1982*. Mexico: Salvat/Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982: 492-493; it also appears in the «Datos biográficos de los fotógrafos,» *El poder de la imagen y la imagen del poder: Fotografías de prensa del porfiriato a la época actual*, Chapingo: Universidad Autónoma Chapingo, 1985: 177; and in the anonymous interview, «Hermanos Mayo,» *Foto zoom*, (1979), with Julio (by Eleazar López Zamora). Cándido is basically in agreement with Julio, as can be seen in his book, *Yo soy la opinión pública*,

México: Ediciones Prisma, 1982: 77. The most recent study on the Mayo accepts Julio's version: see « Trayectoria de los Hermanos Mayo,» Manuel García, curator of the exhibition, «Foto Hnos. Mayo,» published in the catalogue, *Foto Hnos. Mayo*, Valencia: Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, 1992: 34-35.

I find neither evidence of bad faith nor anything out of the ordinary in the fact that two versions exist. Leftist cultural groups are notoriously unstructured, with members entering and leaving constantly. Thus, it is not surprising that fifty years after the fact and with Paco dead there are discrepancies in the versions of Faustino and Julio, above all since they are in agreement that the two of them did not know one another in Spain. After all is said and done, the origin of the name Mayo is only meaningful because of the collective labour which gave them their historical importance.

(3) Julio was captured at the port of Alicante in March of 1939, after his mother, brothers, sister, sister-in-law, and a niece (Paco's daughter) had left for France. He was imprisoned for two years and then had to serve in the army until 1943. He worked in Madrid from 1943 to 1947 as a photographer. He was reclaimed in 1947 through the Mexican Embassy in Lisbon, and came to Mexico in that year. Pablo was reclaimed in 1952, and came to Mexico directly from Spain.

(4) See, for example, the sketches of Jose Bartoli, reproduced in RUIZ FUNES, C. and TUÑÓN, E., *Palabras del exilio 2. Final y comienzo: El Sinaia* (Mexico: INAH-SEP / Librería Madero, 1982); the interviews with refugees which appear in this book provide a shocking image of the way they were treated in the French camps.

(5) Tina Modotti is almost certainly the first critical photojournalist in Mexico, having published some ten photographs during the 1920s in *El Machete*, the newspaper of the Mexican Communist Party. However, these few images apparently had little influence on Mexican photojournalism, and its limited press run does not qualify *El Machete* as a medium for the masses. On Tina Modotti as a photojournalist, see MRAZ, J. «Tina Modotti: en el camino hacia la realidad,» *La Jornada Semanal* 7 (30 July 1989). For a general overview of Mexican photojournalism, see MRAZ, J. «Fotografiant el poder politic a Mèxic,» *Anàlisi*, 22 (1998) and «Photographing Political Power in Mexico,» *Citizens of the pyramid: Essays on Mexican Political Culture*. Amsterdam: Thela Publishers, 1997).

(6) Although the influence in Spain of Weimar photojournalism has not been documented, there is mention of its arrival in Catalonia; see FABRE, I. *Història del fotoperiodisme a Catalunya*, Barcelona: Ajuntament de Barcelona, 1990: 37.

(7) ZELICH, C., «Portraiture, Social Documentation and Photojournalism,» in *Idas & Chaos: Trends in Spanish Photography, 1920-1945*, (n.p., 1985): 161. Among the cultural policies of the Communist International (Comintern) during 1928-1935 was the attempt to link progressive film and photo groups in the Soviet Union, Germany, Switzerland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Holland, France, Japan, Britain and the USA. See DENNEIT, T., «England: The (Workers') Film & Photo League,» in *Left Photography Between the Wars: The International Workers Photographer Movement. Photography/ Politics: One*, London: Photography Workshop, 1979: 100, 116.

(8) See GÓMEZ MOMPART, I. L. «El fotoperiodisme: L' origen de la comunicació visual de masses (1936-1939),» *Anàlisi* 13 (1990), p. 131, where Gómez Mompert quotes Capa. WHELAN, R. also cites this phrase by Capa; see Robert Capa: *A Biography*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1985: 211. On the participation of the Mayos in the Spanish Civil War, see Manuel García, *op.cit.*: 35-42. Mention of the Mayos and/ or copies of their photographs can be found in the following works: *Fotografía e información de guerra. España 1936- 1939*, Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1976; FONTACUBERTA, J., «Notes on Spanish Photography, 1930-1980,» *Afterimage* 10:3 (October, 1982); Agustí Centelles: *Fotografías de la Guerra Civil*, València: Excm. Ajuntament de València, 1986.

Gómez Mompert argues that the Spanish Civil War marks the beginning of modern photojournalism in the world. Although he introduces a technological element in emphasizing the importance of the small-format camera, his position is based largely on the article of COLOMBO, F., «Para la muestra fotográfica sobre la guerra de España,» which appeared in the book, *Fotografía e información de guerra*. Colombo affirms that, «The Civil War marks the birth of the visual communication of events» and, moreover, that the war is the beginning of a committed photojournalism where the subjectivity of the «author» is apparent.

While the Colombo-Gómez Mompert argument is provocative, it fails to take into consideration the war photography of the Mexican revolution (1910-1917), above all that of Jimmy Hare on the U.S.-Mexican border and a photographer named Guerra (whose images form part of the Casasola archive) during the «Tragic Ten Days» of February, 1913. Also, the idea that committed photojournalism begins with the Civil War disregards the work of such well-known photographers as Jacob Riis or Lewis Hine, as well as those employed by the Farm Security Agency: Dorothea Lange, Walker Evans, Ben Shahn, Arthur Rothstein, etc. Perhaps Joan Fontcuberta best synthesizes the specific contribution of this conflict's photography; he asserts that, «Just as Vietnam was the first 'television' war, the Spanish Civil War was the first photographic war, in the sense that the camera not only recorded facts but incited social conscience,» «Notes on Spanish Photography,» *Afterimage* 10:3 (October, 1982): 8.

It appears clear that modern photojournalism in Spain begins during or perhaps shortly before the Civil War, and that an important element in this development is the use of the small-format camera. See MRAZ, I., «Fotoperiodismo en la Guerra Civil Española: la consigna es acercarse,» *Zonas de fotografía* (México) 1 (1993).

(9) The Casasola archive is best known for the multi-volume series which have been reprinted on different occasions, particularly «Historia gráfica de la Revolución mexicana» and «Seis siglos de historia gráfica en México.» On Casasola, see LARA KLAHR, F., *Jefes, héroes y caudillos: Archivo Casasola*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985. In English, see *¡Tierra y Libertad! Photographs of México 1900-1935* from the Casasola Archive, Oxford: Museum of Modern Art, 1985 and *The World of Agustín Víctor Casasola, Mexico: 1900-1938*, Washington D.C., Fondo del Sol Visual Arts and Media Center, 1984. For a revisionist perspective, see GUTIERREZ RUVALCABA, I., «A Fresh Look at the Casasola Archive», *History of Photography*, 20:3 (1996). On Díaz, see *Bailes y Balas: Ciudad de México 1921-1931*, México: Archivo General de la Nación, 1991.

(10) See my interview with Faustino in *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture* and that of Cristina Pacheco, *op.cit.*, p. 86.

(11) See my interview with Faustino and Julio. See also, SOUTO ALBARCE, A., «Fotografía,» in *El exilio español en México, 1939-1982*, cit., p. 493, and MUSACCHIO, «La fotografía de prensa,» 47 and 94. After reviewing various archives, among them those of Enrique Díaz and Nacho López, and talking with the photojournalist, Hector García, I am convinced that the Mayo Brothers were the first to use 35mm cameras in Mexican periodicals. Díaz was one of the best-known graphic reporters during the period 1925- 1960, but apparently never used the small-format camera; negatives of his associates indicate that they began to utilize the 35mm camera in the 1950s. Nacho López began working with a large format camera in the late 1940s, but changed to the smaller camera during the 1950s. This is the same period in which García says he began to use the 35mm camera. It may be worth mentioning that small-format cameras were advertised in Mexican magazines prior to the arrival of the Hermanos Mayo, but were evidently not used in press photography; see *Hoy*, 74 (23 July, 1938): 10, where an ad for a Zeiss Ikon appears.

(12) On the European emigration and the introduction of the small-format camera, see FULTON, M., «Bearing Witness: The 1930s to the 1950s,» in *Eyes of Time: Photojournalism in America*, New York: New York Graphic Society, 1988: 105-172.

(13) See MONSIVAIS, *Siempre!*, cit., and «Los Hermanos Mayo:... y en una reconquista feliz de otra inocencia,» *La Cultura en México*, a supplement of *Siempre!* (12 August, 1981): II-VIII.

The explanation of Julio as to why they took so many negatives is important «We've always maintained a certain autonomy and liberty. On the one hand, we're seriously committed to satisfying our clients' orders and we don't allow other publications who didn't pay the expenses of a shoot to reprint photos which our clients have been given. But, on the other hand, the negatives are our property. So, for example, if we are sent to a factory and the story will require six photos, we take sixty or seventy of the whole work process; we know that later on those other photos of the textile worker or the oil worker or the worker at the lathe will come in handy.»

(14) STRAUSS, D. L., «Photography and Propaganda: Richard Cross and John Hoagland in Central America and in the News,» *Afterimage* 15:9 (April, 1988): 16.

(15) Faustino asserts that *El día* was the publication that has offered him the most control over his photography. Because of his close relationship to Enrique Ramirez y Ramirez, he was allowed to select images for inclusion; others put the cutlines.

(16) Phillip Jones Griffith has described the history of one differentiation between «photojournalists» and «press photographers»:

The terminology in photography is almost entirely based on fragile egos... The guy that starts working for *Picture Post* magazine who goes to Africa for three months to do a story on the wind change in Africa is pretty anxious not to be confused with a press photographer, especially because press photographers for the most part [were considered to] have a very limited vocabulary and big ears and wore strange hats with «Press» stuck in the band. So, he was anxious to call himself something different, so he called himself a photojournalist. Vid. FULTON, M., *Eyes of Time*, cit., p. 188.

According to these categories, the Mayo Brothers would be «press photographers,» while freelance photographers that work for agencies such as Magnum or Gamma-for example, Robert Capa, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Jones Griffiths, or Sebastiao Salgado-would be «photojournalists.»

In Mexico, it is obvious that there is a great difference between the autonomy which Nacho López enjoyed-and which Pedro Valtierra or Francisco Mata Rosas currently possess-and the situation of the Mayo collective. Thus, the Hermanos Mayo are «press photographers,» while López, Mata Rosas or Valtierra are «photojournalists.» The expressivity in many of the Mayo Brothers' photographs makes me hesitant to put them in the category of reporters with «a limited vocabulary, big ears, and strange hats,» but the daily demands made on them clearly limited their aesthetic search.

(17) «An Interview with Sartre,» *The New York Review of Books* (26 March 1970): 22.

- (18) The image of the worker with the hammer is an interesting example of the cooptation of photos in the Mexican mass media. Obviously posed, this photo is the most deliberately political image by the Hermanos Mayo of which I am aware. Nonetheless, the only place I have seen it published was in a paid section of *Mañana*, where it appeared (uncredited) as an illustration for an «ad» on the «Política obrera» (workers' politics) of the Secretary of Labour and soon-to-be President Adolfo López Mateos. See *Mañana* 775 (5 July 1958): 104. It is worth noting that 1958 is the year of the most important labour uprisings in Mexican history.
- (19) ROSENBLUM, N. and W. «Camera Images of Labour-Past and Present,» in *The Other America: Art and the Labour Movement in the United States*, eds. FONER, P. and SCHULTZ, R., London: Journeyman Press, 1985: 135.
- (20) The photography of Héctor García and Enrique Bourdes Mangel of the 1958-59 strikes rivals that of the Hermanos Mayo. See *El poder de la imagen y la imagen del poder*, cit. On García, one of the most important Mexican photojournalists during the period 1950-1990, see *Escribir con luz: Héctor García* Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1985, *Héctor García: México sin retoque*, Mexico: UNAM, 1987 and *Héctor García: Camera oscura*, Veracruz: Gobierno del Estado de Veracruz, 1992.
- (21) The mural where Siqueiros painted this image is in the Jorge Negrete Theater. Siqueiros was commissioned to paint the mural by the National Union of Actors in 1959, but the mural provoked such controversy among the union members that he was never able to finish it; it was covered by a wall and destroyed. See RODRIGUEZ, A., *A History of Mexican Mural Paintings*, London: Thamesand Hudson, 1969:407-408, where photographs of the mural are reproduced in plates 221, 222, and 223.
- (22) See *Mañana* 454 (10 May 1952): 4a and 10a.
- (23) I have taken this concept from ANDERSON, R., «Images of War: Photojournalism, Ideology, and Central America,» *Latin American Perspectives* 16:2 (1989): 110.
- (24) The photo of the mother and son was originally published in a photoessay, «13 instantáneas,» *Mañana*, 627, (3 September 1955), p.105. There, those images which had been selected as the 13 best Mayo photos were arranged year by year, from 1943 to 1955, as if they had been taken in the year to which they were assigned. The magazine's disregard for journalistic truth can be seen in the fact that some of the photos, particularly this one of the mother and her son, were not taken in the year listed; further, the date of the first photo (1943) is, coincidentally, the year of *Mañana's* founding rather than 1939, the year of the Mayo's arrival in Mexico.
- (25) I recently questioned Julio Mayo about the use made of this image. Although he is usually passionate and outspoken, he just shrugged and indicated that this was so common as to make commentary unnecessary.
- (26) These observations of Faustino and Julio on the braceros occurred in conversations during March of 1988; they do not appear in either of my published interviews with them.
- (27) SOLOMON-GODEAU, A., «Who is Speaking Thus? Some Questions About documentary Photography,» *The Event Horizon*, eds. FALK, L. and FISCHER, B. Toronto: Coach House Press, 1987; 203-204. See also SEKULA, A., «Dismantling Modernism, Reinventing Documentary,» *The Massachusetts Review* XIX:4 (Winter, 1978); ROSLER, M., «In, around, and afterthoughts (on documentary photography),» *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. BOLTON, R., Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989; and STEIN, S., «Making Connections with the Camera: Photography and Social Mobility in the Career of Jacob Riis,» *Afterimage* 10:10 (May, 1983).
- (28) Evans' photos of tenant farmers were first published in 1941 as part of the often-reprinted book *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, which was a collaboration with James Agee. Koudelka's images can be found in his book, *Gypsies*, Millerton, N. y.: Aperture, 1971.
- (29) See GREEN, I. R., «Alfonso: Spain's Premier Photojournalist,» *History of Photography* 11:3 (July-September, 1987).